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Turner Favors Overt Aid Over Secret Payments

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WASHINGTON, March 10 — Adm. Stansfield Turner, the new director of the Central Intelligence Agency intends to convert secret payments to foreign leaders into overt aid programs wherever possible, he said yesterday.

He mentioned specifically the recently disclosed secret transfers of cash to King Hussein of Jordan, but he said that in four days on his new job he had not yet learned the facts of that case.

In a breakfast meeting with reporters, Turner said he would meet this week with Attorney General Griffin B. Bell to discuss the possibility of possible new legislation to curb the exposure of Government secrets. He said that he was not primarily interested in penalties for publication but was thinking in terms of punishing unauthorized release of intelligence by those to whom it was entrusted.

On the matter of secret payments, Turner said that one question was whether the arrangement could be converted into a support program under

Agency for International Development or the United States Information Agency.

Another, he said, was whether such a move would involve risks to this country.

"Some of these things have gone on for years and years, and it sometimes shakes the relationship to have them converted," he said.

Turner refused to say whether he believed it was proper for the Washington Post to have disclosed the payments to Hussein just as Secretary of State Cyrus R. Vance was arriving in Jordan for a meeting with the King. He said that was "in the realm of the press."

"I'm not really in a position to judge, when you get information, when you should publish it," he said.

But he went on to say that U.S. relations with Jordan and the rest of the world had been hurt by the disclosure. He said world confidence in U.S. ability to keep secrets had been "very badly shaken."

On another matter, Turner said he had been told that prosecution of former CIA director Richard M. Helms on possible perjury charges would result in the disclosure of secret information that would damage the national security.